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JAN 22 1954

TO: Acting Deputy Director (Administration)

SUBJECT: Improving the Writing Ability of Agency Personnel  
Through Published Guides

Document No. 20  
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11-27-78 By: JS

1. PROBLEM:

To improve the writing ability and correspondence techniques of Agency personnel.

2. ASSUMPTION:

That the Agency desires to improve the abilities of its people whenever possible, provided the cost and time required is reasonable.

3. FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM:

- a. Our writings are substandard. (Appendices A and B)
- b. Our writing weaknesses cannot be readily recognized or corrected. We have neither standards for evaluating our writing, nor guides to improve it.
- c. The value of published guides is recognized by many Federal agencies. (Appendices C, D, E, and F)
- d. Our people have expressed a desire for similar guides. (Appendix A)
- e. Improving the quality of Agency writings is a phase of the Correspondence Management Program. (Appendix G)
- f. The cost in staff salaries to develop the proposed guides cannot be isolated from total salary expenses of the Correspondence Management Program. Facets of the Program are interrelated. Developing one produces material for another. The cost of printing and issuing material, however, will be approximately \$800 the first year, and \$300 each year thereafter.
- g. The guides will be developed by [redacted] of the General Services Office. Their experience and educational backgrounds fully qualify them for the task.

4. DISCUSSION:

a. The writing standards of only ten years ago are outdated. "Gobbledygook," "Federalesque," excess verbiage, and flowery phrases are out of place. They conflict with modern business practices.

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Streamlining is now the order. However, many of our people have not awakened to it. We see examples of this every day—in regulations, correspondence, reports, staff studies, and other writings. An awakening is needed!

b. It might be asked, "Why not use the material of other agencies; their publications seem to be excellent?" We agree, the majority are! However, they do not bring the problem home. They do not, and cannot, show by example where in particular the writings of this Agency are often below modern standards. We can point out our needs convincingly only by illustrating specific Agency deficiencies.

c. In correspondence management, one does not consider the techniques of effective writing apart from other facets of the program. Appendix G is a brief on our Correspondence Management Program. The underscored and starred passages represent aspects of correspondence management dealing with the improvement of writing techniques. Removing these would leave a great void in what we consider a well-rounded effective program.

d. We have found examples of grammatical errors in Agency writings. However, these are not our major concern. We are striving for streamlined readable writing. Aids to grammatically correct writing are well provided for in the proposed Stenographer's and Typist's Guide being developed by the Office of Training. Our proposed guides therefore will not contain material on grammar, punctuation, capitalization, underscoring, and other similar fundamentals.

e. We propose to release text material on a well-planned basis in a series of unclassified informational sheets. Interest will be aroused through the use of fliers and posters. Each of these will also carry a positive message for improving our writing or streamlining correspondence. Issuances will be punched for loose-leaf binding; a cover will be provided with the first release. We feel that this method will encourage recipients to assemble the guides into complete manuals. We further believe that the series method will ensure continuing interest and will appeal to those who are reluctant to peruse a single voluminous text.

f. Development of the proposed guides will be coordinated with the Office of Training.

##### 5. CONCLUSION:

That the Agency will benefit materially by providing its employees with guides to effective writing. The program is needed and desired. Its cost should be recouped many times over through the improved quality of Agency writings, and the general improvement of CIA personnel.

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6. ACTION RECOMMENDED:

That the Chief, General Services Office, be authorized to develop the writing guides described in this paper.

SIGNED

Chief, General Services Office

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ANNEXES:

- Appendix A. Headquarters-Wide Poll to Determine the Agency's Needs for Published Guides on the Techniques of Writing.
- Appendix B. Extracts from Agency Writings.
- Appendix C. "Getting Your Ideas Across Through Writing."
- Appendix D. "Gobble-de-Goek or Plain Talk?"
- Appendix E. "Management Program for Streamlining Correspondence."
- Appendix F. "Effective Letters."
- Appendix G. "Your Correspondence Management Program—Its Aims and How Accomplished."

CONCURRENCE:

SIGNED

MATTHEW BAIRD  
Director of Training

Action by Approving Authority:

Approved:

Date:

Disapproved:

7 Feb 54

While I do not question the desirability of improving "the writing ability and correspondence techniques of Agency personnel", I do not consider that this is a proper function of the General Services Office. I am therefore disapproving the recommendations and forwarding a copy of the study to the Director of Training for such action as he deems appropriate.

(Signed)

L. K. WHITE

Acting Deputy Director  
(Administration)

L. K. W.